

Cat Adoption FAQs

Should I adopt one cat or two?

In a recent study, 7 out of 10 veterinarians said that cats living in a household with a feline companion lived healthier, happier lives than their solo counterparts. Single cats are often more susceptible to separation anxiety, loneliness, and behavior problems.

How do I introduce a new cat to my dog?

The best way to help things go smoothly is to create a "safe room" for the new cat that the dog can't enter. Putting up a baby gate to block off a spare bedroom, bathroom, etc., usually does the job quite nicely. With the baby gate up, the cat can stay in the safe room (with their food, water, litter box, etc.) if it chooses, or it can elect to venture out to meet the dog. As long as the cat knows it has a safe place to get away from the dog, they usually integrate very nicely; you may actually find that your cat likes it so much you keep the safe room blocked off permanently.

How do I introduce a new cat to an existing cat?

Ask your adoption counselor for advice on picking the right new cat to suit your existing cat's personality (for example, if you have an older cat you might not want to bring home a new one that's going to be terribly energetic and overwhelming). It doesn't make much of a difference whether the new friend for an existing pet is the same sex or not, it matters more what their individual personalities are. Once you have made your selection, keep the new cat confined to a cage (with food, water and a litter box, of course) for a period of time first; this will allow both cats to see and smell each other without being physically threatened by one another. Using an open dog crate works better than simply confining the new cat in a separate room, since it gives them more opportunity for safe interactions. Once the cats have acclimated to each other (which can take a few days or even weeks) you can allow the new cat free access. Don't forget to purchase extra litterboxes (the rule of thumb is that you should have one more litterbox than you have cats) and keep them in at least two separate rooms in your house, to avoid litterbox problems caused by one cat keeping the other from getting to the boxes.

What should I feed my new cat?

At the shelter, cats are fed a generic dry cat food, along with donated foods mixed in. You can feed your cat any brand that you prefer, as long as it is complete and balanced; your vet can recommend a brand that will best meet your cat's nutritional needs. Your pet may experience a slight case of digestive upset during the transition, but this should pass in a day or two. Remember that being overweight is no better for cats than it is for people, and cats gain weight for the same reasons people do – too many calories and not enough exercise.

How do I avoid housesoiling problems?

Keep in mind that using a litterbox is a natural behavior for cats, not one that they have to be taught; therefore, if they stop using the box there's always a good reason (at least in their minds!). If your cat suddenly stops using the box, always have your veterinarian check for any medical reasons that might explain why, particularly a urinary tract infection. Infections

frequently lead to housesoiling trouble because they cause pain when the cat tries to urinate or defecate; if the cat experiences pain, it will think that something in the litterbox must have caused it, and it will likely not want to take the risk of using that box again. If there is no underlying medical cause, your cat might be objecting to a dirty box (imagine using an unflushed toilet!) or a strange-smelling litter, or might be being prevented from using the box by another cat in the house. Cats are very sensitive to changes, so do some detective work to try and figure out what the root of the problem might be.

Should I declaw my new cat?

Declawing has actually been outlawed in several countries because it is considered to be inhumane. Even with new advances in laser surgery, it is very painful and can result in serious, long-term behavior problems like biting and housesoiling. A better alternative is to give your cat better options for scratching than your couch! Place several sturdy scratching posts around your home (different cats prefer different textures, so having cardboard, carpet and sisal rope options available is a great idea), or consider using soft nail caps to cover your cat's nail tips – a shelter staff member can demonstrate!

Should I let my cat outdoors?

Keeping your cat indoors is probably the kindest and healthiest thing you can do for her (aside from spaying her!). Believe it or not, the lifespan of the average indoor cat is about 10 years longer than the average outdoor cat (indoor cats can now be expected to live an average of 17-20 years, as opposed to well under 10 years for outdoor cats)! Indoor cats are safe from harm from cars, poisons like antifreeze on driveways, diseases and wounds brought by other cats, fleas and ticks, and the many other dangers that their outdoor cousins face every day. Just to be safe, indoor cats should see the vet every year for a general checkup, and most vets recommend that they receive regular distemper vaccinations and rabies boosters (in the state of Virginia every cat is required to have a current rabies vaccination). However, indoor cats usually do not need to be vaccinated against feline leukemia and other diseases that they could only acquire through exposure to unknown cats.

Do all male cats spray?

Spraying is actually a communication method that cats use to mark their territory and signal that they are ready to mate, particularly intact males (although females in heat are also prone to spraying). Cats that have been spayed/neutered at a young age typically never develop the habit of spraying (although they may develop housesoiling problems, which are separate and distinct from spraying). Cats that are altered later in life may have already developed the habit of spraying, and may do so even after they have been spayed/neutered and can no longer reproduce.

What supplies do I need to get?

To prepare for your new cat's arrival, you should have a food bowl, water bowl, cat bed (or a soft place for it to lay), some toys (most cats love catnip toys), nail trimmers, at least one sturdy

scratching post at least 18" or taller, (having more than one and offering a variety of scratching surfaces is best), a break-away collar with ID (even indoor cats should have identification on at all times) and at least one litterbox (if you already have a box for a cat already in your household, purchase at least one new box for the new cat – the general rule of thumb is you should always have at least one more litterbox than you have cats). If there's a dog in your household, you should purchase a baby gate to block off a "safe room" for the new cat to stay in until he/she is acclimated. If there's another cat in your household, you may want to invest in a wire dog crate to use to jump-start the cat-to-cat introduction process.

How do I choose a veterinarian?

As a County-funded agency we cannot recommend any veterinary office. Ask your friends/neighbors who they use, call various offices to compare prices for routine services (keeping in mind that prices vary widely from region to region), and perhaps even scheduled a consultation with a few vets to see if you like their "bedside manner". Establishing a relationship with a veterinary office early is important – you don't want to have an emergency happen and not have anyone to turn to.

Grooming

Cats generally do a good job of grooming themselves (lack of self-grooming is actually an indication of disease, so take your cat to the vet if its coat begins to look dirty and unkempt), but most cats enjoy regular brushing with a grooming mitt or other soft grooming tool. Overweight cats frequently have a difficult time reaching their hind ends, so keep an eye out for mats, which can become painful. Keep your cat's nails trimmed regularly; if you are uncertain as to how to trim cat nails, ask a shelter staff member for a demonstration.

Why would anyone get an adult cat? Aren't kittens better?

Many people are under the mistaken impression that kittens and kids make the best combination (thinking that they will "grow up together"). Actually, the opposite is true – the American Academy of Pediatrics, a national child advocacy agency, recommends that household with kids under 6 not introduce a puppy or kitten, especially one under 6 months old. That's because puppies & kittens are more likely to bite and scratch kids than older animals (they don't understand that kids don't intend to hurt them when they pull their fur, etc.) and because they don't fully develop their personalities until at least 6 months old, so an apparently kid-friendly kitten may not be such a kid-tolerant adult. When you adopt an adult animal you have a much clearer picture of what their true nature and personality really is, and you can make a much better match between your family and your new pet.

What vaccinations, etc., do cats need?

Your veterinarian will recommend a vaccination schedule appropriate for your new pet. This may include the following:

- Annual feline distemper combination vaccination, which prevents diseases such as feline distemper; typically kittens get a series of two to three booster shots, spaced

one month apart, then begin getting their annual shots one year from the date of their final kitten booster.

- Rabies vaccination; typically kittens get their first rabies vaccination at four months of age, another vaccination one year later, and then are revaccinated every three years.
- Year round flea/tick preventative (typically a liquid placed between the shoulder blades monthly).
- Other tests/vaccinations that your veterinarian recommends (e.g. feline leukemia test and/or vaccination).

How much does it cost to adopt a cat?

The adoption fees payable to the shelter are as follows:

Unspayed Females: \$80.00

Unneutered Males: \$70.00

Cats Already Spayed/Neutered: \$20.00

Gray Whiskers Cats (7 years old or older): Deduct \$10.00 from the adoption fee

If your adopted cat is not already spayed/neutered, the cost of surgery is included in the adoption fee. However, many vets require bloodwork, testing, rabies vaccination, etc., while the animal is at their hospital for surgery. You must call the vet to discuss whether any of these extras will apply, and if so, how much the total charge will be. If your adopted pet is already altered, you will receive a coupon for a free examination by one of our participating vets. The cost of any tests, vaccinations, etc., must be paid for by the adopter. It is important to remember that animals that experience illness or injury can be very expensive, and even healthy animals require yearly vaccinations and vet check-ups.